

DOI 2006 Rural Fire Assistance Grant Process

In late May, Rural Fire Assistance program leaders for the DOI fire management agencies met in Boise, ID to make final decisions on awarding funding under the Department of Interior's Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) program.

Part of the National Fire Plan, RFA is intended to increase local firefighter safety and enhance the fire protection capabilities of rural fire departments across the country by helping them meet accepted standards in qualification, training and performance. RFA has focused on enhancing the capabilities of rural and volunteer fire departments by providing funds for new or upgraded equipment, and by providing advanced training for firefighters and fire officers. RFA has also improved working relationships between federal, state and local fire cooperators.

The awarding of 2006 RFA funds continues to focus on enhancing the capabilities of rural and volunteer fire departments, but agencies have refined the distribution of funds in several ways. DOI agencies have also worked to make the program far more collaborative by increasing the level of involvement of states and other federal partners in the granting process.

According to Don Artley, the National Association of State Foresters' representative at NIFC, the process is working. "The State Forestry organizations greatly appreciate the opportunity to be actively involved in the process of prioritizing RFA grant requests," he said. "Many thousands of rural firefighters are the nation's first line of defense against rural wildland fires, and it's important to assist them with training, resources and equipment."

Updates in the RFA Granting Process

In 2006, the DOI fire agencies refined the criteria used for evaluating and funding eligible requests. The 2006 RFA program priorities are as follows:

First Priority: Requests for standard wildland fire training programs.

Second Priority: Requests for basic personal protective equipment for firefighters, including new generation fire shelters.

Third Priority: Requests for essential handheld and vehicle radio communication needs.

Fourth Priority: Requests for (on a limited basis) critical equipment needs.

The DOI's refinement of focus and priorities for granting RFA funds is designed to meet several goals:

- Continue to support rural fire departments. The DOI values the critical contribution these fire departments make in responding to DOI fires. This response helps keep wildfires small, which saves money and contributes to firefighter safety.
- Leverage RFA funding to support the Ready Reserve program, which seeks to increase the training, safety and overall capacity of rural firefighters.

- Continue to be highly accountable to Congress and the Office of Management and Budget in management of appropriated dollars. To that end, grants are specifically targeted to meet the particular needs of eligible rural fire departments.

RFA Grant Process in 2006

States submitted funding requests through their State Foresters (or equivalent), who approved each state's submission. The DOI's national RFA group then compared each state's request with its average total award received over the previous five years of the RFA program. Unless a state requested an amount less than this average, it was granted at least as much as its five-year average.

Requests generally observed DOI program funding guidelines, and since many states had already been granted funds for fire training under the FY 06 "Ready Reserve" program, many of the requests centered on equipment needs (personal protective gear, radio communications, and basic firefighting equipment). Although the RFA group did not change states' funding priorities, the group did reduce awarded dollar amounts when requests included lower priority items such as pumps and apparatus.

For 2006, the RFA program awarded an average of \$516,000 to western states (not including Alaska). Requests for eastern, southeastern and northeastern states were much more modest than western state requests, and in most cases, these states received funding for all or nearly all of what they requested.

DOI 2006 Rural Fire Assistance Grants

	BIA	BLM	FWS	NPS
Training				
Grant Funding	\$90,876	408,338	77,157	52,977
# of Grants	6	65	39	7
PPE				
Grant Funding	\$185,090	1,111,156	384,194	268,540
# of Grants	26	213	79	93
Radio Communication				
Grant Funding	\$126,326	540,042	324,893	202,716
# of Grants	15	66	46	25

Combination*				
Grant Funding	\$1,042,707	2,997,782	659,376	887,330
# of Grants	95	225	16	128
Other Requests				
Grant Funding	\$10,024	268,199	11,340	128,937
# of Grants	7	33	1	8
Totals				
Funding	\$1,455,023	\$5,325,517	\$1,456,960	\$1,487,523
No. of Grants	149	602	181	261
Total Funding	\$9,725,023			
Total Grants	1,193			

*Combination grants were those that include any two or all three of the 2006 RFA grant categories (Training, PPE, and Radio Comm).

For more information about the Rural Fire Assistance program, please contact staff at the National Interagency Fire Center.

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